It seems only as yesterday that I stood with Dr. Lyon in this place, taking part with him in a funeral service; the last occasion that brought us together in the ministrations of the church. As we afterward walked down the path from the church to the street he said to me, I remember, that sometimes questions of the reality of a life to come rose within him; but then the thought, what is the good of anything without that conviction, immediately came to quiet and steady his mind.

The remark was entirely characteristic of the man; of his great frankness and honesty, and of his immense good sense with regard to life's longer questions as a whole. This, I say, is as fresh in my memory as any picture of the past could be; and now, while he has entered that light which no man may approach unto, I linger behind to say what I can of the earthly life of my friend.

Mr. Emerson once said to Mr. Alcott, so the first of these two sages of Concord once ~~himself~~ told me, that he (Mr. Alcott), must go first out of the world. And when the latter queried why this should be, Mr. Emerson replied, "Because I can then give a better account of you to the world than ever you could give of yourself".

I will not pretend that this is any reason why I should be here, the earthly survivor, to speak of one whose work on earth is done. But I can speak of Dr. Lyon in terms that he was not likely to use, in any estimate he made of himself, even though he employed them only in the secrecy of his own heart; and the account which I have to give of him is one that I should be proud indeed to have anyone give of me.

First of all, I would like to express a little of my feeling of personal indebtedness to him, if I may be forgiven for so obtruding myself in this connection. No one could be more fortunate than I was when it came to pass that he was my successor in this pulpit. It was my great good fortune to succeed here, at an earlier day, a man who,

though beside me he rose to the stature of an intellectual giant, was constantly kind and thoughtful in his bearing toward me. For this, Dr. Hedge is a man whom I remember with boundless gratitude.

When I came to surrender the ~~of~~ office of minister of this church I had already received a lesson as to the way in which such an office should be turned over to other hands; and I then received another lesson as to the beautiful courtesy which the follower may show to his predecessor in the christian ministry.

Between Dr.Lyon and myself no shadow of jealousy ever came about those ties which bind together minister and people. I had made lifelong friendships in this place,and he was more than glad,he was eager to have me keep them. Also he was more than just,he was flattering in his assurance that he was carrying out my work and completing what I had begun.

I knew then,and I know now,that he was in no wise indebted to me for the success of his career;for he had abundant initiative and sagacity of his own. But his obvious desire to have me feel that I still retained a kind of partnership with him in the affairs of this Parish was most comforting to my soul;and I shall never cease to think gratefully of him for this generous disposition.

Dr.Lyon was so nearly the ideal Parish minister that I might almost draw an imaginary portrait of what such a man would be, and present it here as a likeness of him. But the time allotted me will hardly suffice for that. Nor can I say of him all the good I would like to say,though I make my sketch from life,abandoning all fanciful adornment. I can only set forth what seem to me the fundemental elements of his character.

First,I wish to describe him as the possessor of an entirely honest mind, He did not,and could not live in any world of make-believe and pretence. He was honest in his dealing with the facts of life

and history, so far as he could know them, (and he made it his business to know them as they actually were); he was honest with himself, and on his guard against those self-deceptions that easily victimize the unwary mind.

The world has never yet understood how great a matter this is, or what a fine balance is required to be kept, in order to produce a genuine honesty. We cannot live without ideals, and imagination is one of our greatest gifts. Yet it is a gift that is forever turning this life of ours into a kind of play-acting; transforming it into nothing but a game.

Really, this world is not a stage, and its men and women are not merely players. But the tendency of romanticism and idealism is always to make it that; to make the men of every generation "like children sitting in the market places," pretending that things are thus and so, and carrying on the fictitious parts, even with the roar of a very real passion in their ears.

The problem is to keep our ideal world, and yet to know the real world as if that were alone in view. He who knows only the ideal is nothing but a dreamer. He who knows only the real is profoundly ignorant, because he sees nothing of the ideal by which it is so often transfigured and glorified. There is a deal of so called "realism" which is the worst of fiction; because it imagines that life at bottom is nothing but ugliness and ferocity.

We are not unfamiliar with a blatent sort of honesty, which chiefly thanks God that it is not as other men are; and which is as dishonest in clinging to its self-righteous illusion as the whole pharisaic tribe, to which it belongs. Most men mean to be honest, but they do not always succeed in achieving honesty; because so many imagined things get seated in their minds as part of their vision of reality.

Now Dr. Lyon succeeded, to somewhat rare degree, in making and keeping himself an honest man. He had no other instinct or impulse but to see things as they are. And he saw them in true perspective;

the lower world in its place, and the ideal above the real. This gave him that keen sense of humor which has been the salvation of many a mind. Because, if one cannot see the ludicrous dislocations that life sometimes presents, he is not likely to perceive well the right and true relations in which things stand to each other.

He cared supremely to behold life with clear and honest eyes; and he was incapable of making public profession of what he did not think and feel. He had no interest in any art of creating appearances where the reality behind the appearance was wanting. For every kind of sham and subterfuge, by which men are wont to disguise from themselves the reality of things, an actual situation, he could feel nothing but contempt and scorn. It was to him a sort of childishness, of which the mature mind ought to be ~~ashamed.~~ ashamed.

And this, in the scale of human virtues, stands far higher than the world in general has yet realized. Sometimes, as in the person of President Lincoln, it is made to feel what a rock, amid flood and storm, simple honesty can be. And sometimes, as at this moment, it is made to witness a huge demonstration of the awful mischief that systematic duplicity and self-deception may produce, when they become the habit of a people.

But for still human nature, as a rule, is far too distrustful of the naked truth; far too much given to cherishing its pet illusions; far too easily persuaded that, if it shuts its eyes to the facts, it is as if the facts were not there. A scrupulously honest man is still enough of a rarity in this world of ours to be worth more than a passing remark; and it is to such a man that we here erect a permanent memorial.

The second trait of character that I wish to emphasize in Dr. Lyon's career is one that grows out of this, and would be impossible without this, as its root and spring. We speak of it often as "practical" wisdom, or sagacity. But if we mean by that qualifying word to indicate our belief that there is a higher and better kind of wisdom, then

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

https://archive.org/details/williamhlyonserm00brow

I think the adjective might better be ~~one~~ omitted.

What I mean is the ability to see life as a whole; to see any given situation as a whole; and to know, as it were instinctively, what should be done (or said) in face of that situation. Such wisdom is the natural outgrowth of painstaking intellectual honesty, of long and persistent habit in trying to see things as they are.

In this sense Dr. Lyon was a very wise man, and a safe counsellor for those who wished to make use of his insight. He had the sacred gift of what we call "common sense"; though, as men go, it is rather an uncommon sense. He was not apt to be much astray in his judgment of the proper course to pursue, or in his valuations of mental and moral worth.

One great trouble with this world is that it is so incurably doctrinaire; having an overweening fondness for its own inventions and theories. Men speculate that if only this or that expedient might be universally adopted they, and everybody, might then live "happy ever afterward." They are apt to forget that the world must grow out of one state into another, and to imagine that by taking sufficient thought about it they can add an indefinite number of cubits to the world's stature.

Now we must have theories; we cannot proceed at all without some working hypothesis to go upon. But when men begin to alter facts to suit their theories; or when they so elaborate their theoretical views that they cannot any longer see through them, to reach the actual facts in the case, which are thus lost wholly out of sight, then trouble and disaster are close at hand.

What I should like to comment upon in the mind of Dr. Lyon, as I knew him, is the exact opposite of this. There was constant recognition on his part that theories must be cut to suit the realities of life; and that knowledge of these ~~realities~~ realities, at first hand, is the main business of any trustworthy intelligence. First, know what is; let your deductions and explanations come afterward. And never be perduaded that any amount

of amiable theorizing, as to what might be, can get you out of the scrape, if you have seriously mistaken and misjudged concerning the actual situation with which you had to deal.

Dr. Lyon had the wisdom which goes with this habit of mind in very marked degree. It is of small use to have beautiful visions of something lying on life's far horizons, or (in Emersonian phrase) to "hitch your wagon to a star", if you do not know, or see enough to get safely over the bog that lies immediately across your way.

Now Dr. Lyon had as much sight as the next man, perhaps, of the distant prospects of humanity; and he had, with that, great skill in picking the road by which it was possible to get forward toward that distant prospect. There is a kind of idealism which appears to be utterly contemptuous of this faculty; whose one motto appears to be, "Drive on! and you will get there somehow."

But for my own part I hold the world much more indebted to those who can make, or show, a practicable road. We have dreamers in plenty, Of really sagacious minds, our supply is always somewhat limited. Such a mind, whose friendship and counsel we have been privileged to share, we come together at this time to honor and commemorate.

Once more, I wish to speak of a great kindliness of heart, which was not less marked in him than these other attributes of which we have spoken. I do not know that, in this single respect, he is to be placed above many others; perhaps not above the average of men. Kind hearts, heaven be praised, are many in this world; even though wise heads may be few. But kind hearts in combination with just the qualities I have here specified, are not so numerous.

Unusual honesty of thought and purpose does not always beget charity toward one's neighbor. On the contrary, it is rather apt to judge harshly, and to scant the allowance that needs to be made for human weakness, Exceptional wisdom, in dealing with life's problems, tends to be somewhat

impatient of the fumbling and bungling of those who know but little what they do. But I never knew Dr. Lyon to fail in maintaining a kindly and tolerant attitude. He was geniunely interested in his fellow mortals, just as he found them; not inclined to be censorious, but to put the best possible interpretation on their behavior. He had sympathy, and tact, and a most evident desire to help and serve, in all his intercourse with men.

His life really overflowed with a spirit of kindliness and good will. This made a conjunction of qualities in him that gave him rare worth, both as minister and man. One felt the entire genuineness of his whole being. However he might be sounded, he always rang true. And the tone he gave forth was so vibrant with affection and benignity, that honor and respect for him were soon merged in the deeper feeling of love.

gal 3.

With regard to his qualifications as a religious leader of his kind, I shall only venture to speak in quite general terms. That is something to be felt rather than overmuch talked about; for when we come to the inner shrine of the human soul, it is almost as much a mystery as is the divinity on high, which no searching can find out.

The root and spring of religion in the world, I suppose, is a fixed persuasion of the mind that the world where we play our part is, in some measure at least, helped and governed from another world which, as yet, we do not see. There may be endless diversity of opinion as to what this other world is; but one to whom it is under any picture of it a sure reality may be called a religious man.

At all events, if he thinks of the unseen power as a beneficent reality, his life is rooted and grounded in religion. When people think of the spiritual realm as being peopled only, or chiefly, with shapes that inspire dread and fear, perhaps the more appropriate word would be superstition. But, clearly, a conviction of some power of good that is with us and over us, and in which we can trust for a good ending of out life-journey, is a religious conviction.

In this sense Dr.Lyon was truly a religious leader; a m of God in the world of men. The remark of his which I quoted at the beginning is evidence and illustration of his faith. "What is the good of anything, if we may not think of this life of ours as being carried forward into another world?" But what then, one may ask, is the ground of our assurance that there is good in anything?

Well, there is no time here to attempt to answer that question. But Dr.Lyon had such asurance. The thought which he stated, as one on which his soul could rely, had no value or force without such assurance. However he came by it ; whether it was born in him , or he achieved it as the result of study and meditation; he knew in his heart that there must be a "far off end of good toward which the whole creation moved;" and that there were powers at work in the universe, far mightier than any we can ~~direct~~ use, to direct our existence toward that destined goal.

This conviction it was his life work to impart to others, or to strengthen and ~~build~~ up in other minds. To some extent this faith is contagious; we catch it from those with whom it is abundant and strong. The man who, in his inmost being doubts the rule of goodness, may argue learnedly and ingeniously for the position of faith, and through all his words we shll feel the chill of his spiritual skepticism. The man at the core of whose nature lies the warmth and glow of a great certainty that love and goodness are supreme, wiil radiate that vital heat to others; so that by simple contact with him the faith may be strengthened and spread.

But in this age, and among people of our kind, there is much need to enlist reason on the side of faith. The heart's assurance must be able to bear some degree of critical analysis; and it must be shown to our intelligence that we have a reasonable right to trust in an overruling Providence which guides our life toward wise and just results.

In both these ways Dr.Lyon was a religious leader of note. His mind was deeply anchored to the conviction that this world lies